



*Reinvigorating Civil Society voices and Networks for
Democracy and Good Governance*

~ WADEMOS Launch Speech ~

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On the Occasion of the

**LAUNCH OF THE WEST AFRICA DEMOCRACY SOLIDARITY NETWORK
(WADEMOS) AND CONFERENCE ON COUNTERING THREAT TO
DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA**

Kempinski Hotel, Accra - Ghana

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Hon. Thomas Mboma, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Republic of Ghana representing **Hon. Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey**; Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Republic of Ghana;

Hon. Kamissa Camara, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Mali;

H.E. Ulla Andren, Head of Regional Development Cooperation in Africa, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency;

Amb. William Awinador-Kanyirige, Senior Advisor on Governance & Peace-building, African Union;

Amb. Baba Gana Wakil, ECOWAS Permanent Representative to Ghana;

Amb. Michael Ofori-Atta, Office of the President, Republic of Ghana;

Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners Here Present;

Representatives of International Organizations;

My brother Prof. Kwasi Prempeh, Executive Director, CDD-Ghana, the Secretariat of WADEMOS;

Representatives of Constituent Members of WADEMOS across West Africa;

Gentlemen of the Press;

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I bring you greetings and expressions of solidarity from H.E. Omar Alieu Touray, President of the ECOWAS Commission, to the Center for Democratic Development - Ghana and the thirty odd civil society organizations across West Africa for the brilliant and timely initiative to birth this Network, whose principal objective is to strengthen and protect the guardrails of the region's fledgling democracy and good governance.

I also wish to express the Region's profound appreciation to H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana, for his impactful stewardship of our cherished Organization, ECOWAS, over the last couple of years, in particular his dogged determination to reverse the unconstitutional changes of Government by the military; ECOWAS likewise salutes the successive governments and people of Ghana for demonstrating with deeds over the last 30 years that democracy and the peaceful alternation of power are worth nurturing and safeguarding. It is only befitting that the WADEMOS initiative is being outdoored here in the welcoming city of Accra.

Finally, I wish to tell you how humbled and honored I am to be invited by the organizers to be part of this groundbreaking experience and to register my pride for the opportunity to participate in the discourse about countering threats to democracy and good governance in West Africa and to address this august gathering on the occasion of the launch of the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS).

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Permit me to take a step back to evaluate the importance that ECOWAS has placed on creating collaborative working relationship with civil society at the regional and Member States levels. The founding instruments of the Economic Community of West African States, in particular the ECOWAS Treaty, saw civil society as an indispensable partner in the regional integration process, hence the decision to foresee the establishment of ECOSOC as a platform for civil society interactions with the regional body and for contributions to the codification of regional norms and practices.

Needless to emphasize, civil society mobilization, activism and advocacy, particularly those of community based, faith-based, women and other non-governmental organizations, were instrumental in galvanizing ECOWAS to accompany the populations in the so-called third wave of democratization – the popular struggles against military, one-party and autocratic rules, to end civil wars and lay the nascent foundations for liberal democracy and the rule of law in the 1980s and early 1990s. I need not emphasize either, the leadership role of intellectuals and other civil society representatives in crafting pioneering protocols and other normative instruments to guide the behaviour of Member States and to strengthen democratic culture, which instruments served as templates for similar undertakings across Africa. Among these, I would like to single out the ECOWAS Protocols on Free Movement, on the Mechanism, on Democracy and Good Governance and, lately, the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework.

That partnership between the regional body and civil society marked the golden era that amplified the impact of civil actors, such as the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the Mano River Women's Network, the West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOF), RADDHO, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), Centre for Democracy and Development and the Centre for Democratic Development, to mention but a few at the regional level.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Paradoxically, the advent of liberal democracy, for various reasons and not least the loss of a common bogeyman, be it the autocrat or military ruler, and the opportunities that the new dispensation offered some key civil society leaders to cross carpet from civil society into party politics, have tended to weaken civil society activism and solidarity across borders.

This false feeling of a 'mission accomplished' acted as an enabler for some new civilian regimes to re-establish new virtual dictatorships through state capture. Today, the region is increasingly witnessing democracy-eroding practices, including acts of strategic retreat from democratic norms, the manipulation of democratic norms, weaponization of the judiciary and instrumentalization of security agencies and identity to silence and marginalize opposition and dissenting voices, including civil society and the media. Thus, the central pillar of ECOWAS' constitutional convergence criteria enshrined in the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, namely "Zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means", is under

sustained assault and under stress. Through fake and manipulated referenda, some democratically-elected Presidents have sought, with various degrees of inglorious success, to maintain power beyond constitutionally-mandated term limits. On-going efforts by the regional body and civil society to institutionalize term-limits across the region are facing fierce resistance from some quarters. Meanwhile, governance deficits, including the progressive retreat of the State from the periphery and an abdication of the responsibility of the State to provide basic services are weakening social contracts between the populations and their rulers and rendering Member States vulnerable to opportunistic interventions in politics by the military and nefarious actors, particularly in the context of an asymmetric conflict environment.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Governance deficits, and the new variables in the security landscape - terrorism and violent extremism - are proving to be veritable threat multipliers against democracy and good governance and an additional challenge to civil society's pro-democracy efforts. It is instructive to note that while the military cited unconstitutional maintenance of power and repression by ex-President Alpha Condé as justification for the coup d'état in Guinea in 2021, in the case of Mali and Burkina Faso, pervasive insecurity and institutional graft were proffered as the main reasons for the military takeovers.

I would like to stress, however, that it is not all doom and gloom in the continuous efforts to promote democratic culture and rule of

law in the region. I would like to characterise the current state of affairs as the glass being half full, rather than half empty. First, the three cases of successful military incursions into politics pale in comparison to the fact that all the other twelve Member States, to varying degrees of transparency and credibility, I must hasten to add, continue to go through the rituals of regular and periodic elections to select their leaders. Furthermore, the events in Niger in 2009-2010, the *Balai citoyen*-led popular insurrection in Burkina Faso in 2014 and the role of The Gambian civil society alongside ECOWAS in the restoration of democracy and rule of law in the country in 2016, amply demonstrate the continued potency and potential of civil society in promoting and protecting democracy and the rule of law. It is also not surprising that ECOWAS achieves commendable outcomes whenever civil society has created the conditions for ECOWAS to intervene and where the two have worked hand in glove. We must build on those best practices.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The clarion call and key strategic goal of ECOWAS Vision 2050 is the transformation of the region from an ECOWAS of States into an ECOWAS of Peoples, where inclusive prosperity, democracy, peace and security are assured. The President of the Commission has outlined four key strategic objectives of his administration, among which are peace and security, financial and economic integration, inclusive sustainable development and partnerships, in particular with the Region's civil society. To the extent that we can transform the Region into an ECOWAS of Peoples, civil society shall remain the main enabler. I wish to assure you that in the new ECOWAS

Commission administration, you will find a committed partner and an active enabler of effective civil society contributions to the regional integration agenda. It is the expectation of ECOWAS, therefore, that the past and recent salutary roles of our region's civil society will inspire current efforts to reboot civil society activism and advocacy. We are, in this regard, confident that with the establishment of WADEMOS, most civic actors in our Member States will seize the opportunity of being members of the network to promote accountability, good governance, peace and stability across the ECOWAS region. Furthermore, we believe that WADEMOS, composed of some 30-odd civil society organizations from across the entire ECOWAS region, can position itself as a catalytic agenda setter in building synergies and networks across the region to accompany and act as watchdog over Member States and ECOWAS in the areas of democracy and good governance, inclusive development, peace and security. In particular, we urge WADEMOS to team up with similar networks across the region to ensure the operationalization of the ECOWAS ECOSOC as a civil society interface with ECOWAS institutions in promoting the regional agenda.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

ECOWAS is constantly re-appraising its strategies to create opportunities for CSO platforms such as WADEMOS, to use its reach at the regional level, to open up and re-energise the civic space across ECOWAS Member States. To make this a functional reality, ECOWAS will in the near future be working with CSOs for the possible establishment of a mechanism to monitor the performance

of Member States with regard to democratic consolidation and broader human security endeavours. As aptly pointed out in the Freedom House Report of 2019 that of the 12 countries with the largest most significant year-on-year score declines around the world, no fewer than five (5) are in West Africa. Contestable as this claim may be, the freedom House report, we believe, should provide the impetus for both ECOWAS and civic actors in our Member States to develop and own their own mechanisms and narrative for evaluating and advancing democratic tenets that are context specific to our regional security and good governance exigencies.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Permit me, in conclusion, to express our gratitude to the organizers of this conference and constituent members of WADEMOS for this praiseworthy initiative. In particular, I would like to appreciate CDD-Ghana for hosting the WADEMOS secretariat, and to thank partners, particularly the Government of Sweden, for the generous support to the initiative. On that note, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my single honor, on behalf of the organizers, to hereby declare the West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network duly and formally launched.

I thank you for your kind attention.